

*A Dissertation
on
The effects
of
Abstinence
in
The prevention
and
Cure of
DISEASE.*

John D. Price

admitted March 10th 1820

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So many different Theories on the subject of Animal life have been maintained by men whose talents & opportunities entitle them to the greatest respect, that it may now with some confidence be conjectured that like Perpetual Motion it is a matter beyond the ken of mortal man fully to comprehend. Nevertheless a correct Theory on this subject might go very far towards facilitating our knowledge of the cure of the deranged state of its several functions: and so long as any remain, who scorn to tread the path of ignorance or error, merely because others have trodden it before them, it is to be hoped that this dark corner in science may yet receive illumination, to the praise of some genius of brighter mould: thro' the influences of Him alone who is the Author of life & Source of all wisdom.

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It is not material to the investigation of the subject now attempted, that every particular respecting the method of our existence should be fully understood. Whether with Heraclitus & Parmenides & Hippo we believe that a fiery principle in the shape of an invisible fluid or exhalation - or of fire or of vapour animates the machine: Or whether with Pythagoras we think that a detachment from the great anima mundi, or with Plato that a plastic nature half soul & half body, or with Aristotle that a principle, which he calls the first entelechia of the natural organic body - having three faculties a nutritive, a sentient & a rational one - has the living powers under its direction: Whether with Epicurus we believe the principle of life & intelligence is only a modification of matter, or with the great Hippocrates & others we contend for a Quintessence - an anima - a divina - a calidum innatum - a ra-

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 ever opinion we adopt viz. That there is a
 something in living matter which sepa-
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 Creator, which duly & properly satisfied con-
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 tended to, sink into disease, which, I should
 rather consider a forced or unnatural state.
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 think these appetites in our present condition

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depraved & craving much more than necessary, requiring in youth the restraint of superiors & in adult age the steady rein of reason to keep them in due subjection. Nevertheless I cannot in any wise agree with those who consider nourishment the stimulus inducing Death. It is true some animals have lived we know not how long in impenetrable cavities destitute of all that we esteem essential to active life. & seeds we know may exist for an indefinite period - without developing their living germs. Yet for the purposes of active life, however depraved may be the instinctive appetite of an infant, thro' the sin of its parent, most certainly the All-wise Creator, who does nothing in vain - would not have provided a breast to afford it milk - & all the varied apparatus for digestion & nourishment - had it not been intended that useful, visible life should be ours.

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ained in this manner. It^d doubtless the excess of stimulus, or the improper use of necessary sustenance, which induces disease: the mode therefore in which stimulus operates in bringing on disease will best introduce the *modus operandi* of the Remedy now proposed.

"Man & other warm blooded animals are similarly & wonderfully made. The stomach & other organs associated with it, by the agency of their respective juices, dissolve the food & pour its nutritious qualities into the current of the blood which is returning to the heart. The heart receives this mixture and throws it into the vessels of the lungs, where by its exposure to the atmospheric air, it acquires new properties & returns to the heart fitted to produce the secretions, to contribute to the growth & nourishment of every part of the body, to which it is immediately con-

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ried by the arteries. Vitality or life which seems to be seated in the brain & its appendages, puts this whole apparatus in motion & communicates its influences to every part of the system, thro' the medium of the nerves. Thus the brain, the blood vessels, the lungs, & the organs of digestion, are mutually dependent on each other. Jointly they produce the continuation of life.

"Organized beings have their limited periods of growth, maturity, & decay. Simple nutritious food, pure air, & rest, are all that is necessary to perfect the first, prolong the second, & to render tranquil the third stage of existence."

"The substances which afford nourishment to animals are sugar, starch, glue, farina, mucilage, vegetable acids, oil, water, & animal matter. These simple el.

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ments are compounded in a variety of ways in the substances used for food, & are sometimes found mixed with other ingredients highly deleterious to animal life. To enable us to choose our food with safety, the benevolent Creator made the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, & taste, capable of distinguishing between the salutary & noxious. Until these guards have become vitiated, there is but little danger of swallowing poisons inadvertently. If in any instance this does happen, they prove offensive to the nerves of the stomach, intestines, glands, or blood vessels, & an effort is made to expel them by vomiting, sweating, or the other excretories.

"In perfect health all the organs perform their respective functions with ease. the appetite craves nothing but simple food, which is easily digested, & converted into blood;

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exercise aids the circulation & corporeal and mental vigour distinguishes the happy man."

"What interrupts this delightful condition produces pain, languor, & all the maladies that embitter life, is, most frequently, an attempt to improve on the design of nature, to procure pleasure from poisoned streams, & nourishment from forbidden fruits.

"Stimulants (pepper, spices, bitters, and all those things which are commonly considered strengthening & wholesome, because warming to the stomach) in a concentrated form, destroy the organization & life; more diluted they blister; rendered still weaker, they only produce smarting and increase the warmth of the part to which they are applied. When applied to parts, the subject of which is to secrete juices, for spe-

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cial purposes in the animal economy, they increase the quantity & vitiate the quality, of such secretions. To illustrate this we need only refer to their operation on the eye. The delicate coats of this organ are instantly inflamed; the mild & bland fluid which washes & lubricates it in health becomes so corrosive, that it even blisters the skin, if suffered to run over the cheek any length of time. In like manner, pepper, for example, an article extensively used in modern cookery, increases and vitiates the secreted juices of the mouth & stomach. These juices are provided by nature to dissolve & digest the food. In the same proportion that they lose their natural qualities, the powers of digestion are lessened. When this happens from the use of stimulants, a sensation resembling hunger is produced. Consequently a larger

The first of these is the fact that the
 human mind is not a blank slate at birth.
 It is filled with a vast amount of
 information that is passed on from
 generation to generation. This information
 is not only in the form of words and
 ideas, but also in the form of habits and
 customs. The second fact is that the
 human mind is not a passive receiver of
 information. It is an active participant
 in the process of learning. The third
 fact is that the human mind is not a
 single entity. It is composed of many
 different parts, each of which has its
 own functions. The fourth fact is that
 the human mind is not a static entity.
 It is constantly changing and growing.
 The fifth fact is that the human mind
 is not a purely rational entity. It is
 also a creature of emotions and feelings.
 The sixth fact is that the human mind
 is not a purely individual entity. It is
 also a creature of social relationships.
 The seventh fact is that the human
 mind is not a purely physical entity. It
 is also a creature of spiritual beliefs and
 values. The eighth fact is that the
 human mind is not a purely scientific
 entity. It is also a creature of art and
 imagination. The ninth fact is that the
 human mind is not a purely logical
 entity. It is also a creature of intuition
 and instinct. The tenth fact is that the
 human mind is not a purely abstract
 entity. It is also a creature of concrete
 experience and reality.

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quantity of food is taken than can be perfectly digested. Here we discover the prolific source of what are usually termed bad humours, with all their attendant evils. By this continued abuse of the stomach the natural appetite is destroyed. That which was before offensive is now most highly relished. Simple food, that which is best suited to nourish & invigorate is loathed & rejected. An artificial appetite for other poisons is acquired; & he who has thus vitiated his taste will seldom be satisfied with such drinks as were designed by nature to ^{supply} satisfy every want of this kind. Water is tasteless; something acid, or pungent must take its place; & fortunate will he be, should he not resort to ardent spirits in some form or other, to relieve that thirst which high-seasoned food occasions.

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toxicating qualities (opium, ardent spirits, tobacco &c.) produce effects common with other stimulants on the parts to which they are applied. Their operation on the nervous system is still more injurious. When taken in moderate quantities "they produce a kind of artificial genius, vigour, & vivacity. They lift a man's intellectual faculties as well as his feelings, above their ordinary level. & if by the same means they could be kept for any length of time in that situation, it might constitute something like an apology for having had recourse to them. But the excitement of the system can in no instance be urged above its accustomed & natural pitch, without this being succeeded by a correspondent degree of depression." When taken to excess, pleasurable sensation is for a short time carried to its highest elevation.

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"Elysium opens round,
A pleasing frenzy buoy's the lightened soul;
But soon this Heaven is gone."

Wild delirium, loss of voluntary motion, stupor, sleep, nausea, & vomiting, follow in rapid succession. To this more or less fever accompanied by shivering, inactivity of body & mind, pain in the head, thirst, anxiety, & other symptoms of indirect debility, succeed. To relieve such distressing complaints, the deluded sufferer, too often resorts again to the deceitful potion. The same round of joy & madness & distress follows. Still he is not weaned from the bewitching cup, till the powers of life are almost exhausted, when by a wise provision of nature, the hitherto delicious poison becomes so loathsome & offensive, that it can no longer be retained in the stomach: the system is therefore from necessity allowed

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in some measure to recover its impaired energies. "There is however no imprudence in regard to health which does not tell," & altho' after a fit of intoxication, a man may seem to recover all his former vigour, the event will probably prove that he has lost 'a slice of his constitution'. - Those frequently suffer most in the end, who do not appear to suffer immediately from every act of indiscretion."

Such is the operation of every substance naturally calculated to support life, if taken in quantities too great for the powers of the stomach to conquer & digest.

Hence may easily be inferred

The *modus operandi* of Abstinence:

For whenever disease is induced in the manner just detailed, no recovery can possibly take place, ~~if~~ while additions are continually ~~made~~ made to the acting cause of the

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complaint. Abstinence, here acts like the cross-bar to the street - which prevents any interruption to the workmen employed in its repair, or more properly - like the Splint on the fractured limb - which keeps it at rest while the powers of nature are effecting its cure. It allows the exhausted functions of the digestive apparatus to recover their vigour & energy, by affording that state of quietness so necessary for this purpose in every part of the body.

Application to the cure of Diseases.

In most of the diseases of the digestive system, our remedy claims the preeminence over every other: More especially in those where the stomach is principally affected. In all diseases, it is thought best generally to attend to the indications of nature & endeavour to promote that object, which she seems to aim at in obtaining relief, herself.

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Hence the loathing of food, the nausea,
& vomiting in Dyspepsia, sick head aches,
point to abstinence as a certain means
of immediate relief, & a very probable
one of permanent cure. With respect to
the latter of the two diseases mentioned, which
beyond all doubt originates in the stom-
-ach, I have the testimony of a respect-
-ble gentleman residing near Baltimore
in favour of our remedy. He informed me
that he had been for several years much
distressed by a frequent return of this com-
-plaint, from which no remedy afforded
him any relief. At length, to use his own
words he determined on starving it away.
He commenced by fasting single days at
a time - & finding this not sufficient,
he oftened abstained from all nourishment
for two days in succession; so that at the
close of the second day, hunger literally

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disturbed his sleep by producing the most tantalizing dreams of luxurious feasting & spreading continually before his fancy the most elegant repasts. Success, however, complete & permanent, at length crowned his reiterated attempts, & a temporary self denial, has terminated in a perfect cure: as no return of the complaint has been experienced for years.

Dr. Wm Price of this city has kindly furnished me with another case which occurred to himself while residing in Paris. The Lady with whom he boarded had become so enslaved to the Sick-Head-ache that twice in the week, she was obliged to do penance to this avenging Tyrant. The Doctor recommended anticipating the return of her complaint by voluntary Abstinence. For two months this remedy was perfectly successful, & would doubt-

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lefs have effected a permanent cure, had it been entered upon with resolution & persisted in for any sufficient length of time.

In all those diseases of the alimentary canal which arise from irritation or inflammation of its membranes, it would be madness to administer nourishing & stimulating food, until rest has allowed the surcharged bloodvessels of the parts to become relieved of their load. For the increased action of any part is always accompanied by an increased flow of blood. Hence in Dysentery, in Cholera Morbus &c. where the delicate membranes of the intestines are highly irritated & inflamed - strict Abstinence should precede & accompany all the measures pursued in their cure.

In Fevers of all kinds, our remedy becomes an indispensable handmaid to the evacuating

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treatment. Fever always originates in the alimentary canal - probably from an irritation of its mucous membrane by miasma or some other deleterious substance. To administer stimulus therefore in such a state of the stomach & intestines, would be to add fuel to the fire already kindled. Hence the maxim so very common, To starve a fever, but Feed a cold. In the whole of this class of diseases, as in all the Phlegmasia, or in other words, according to the lucid arrangement of our Professor, in all the diseases of the circulatory system, abstinence should be a very principal remedy. While bleeding, purging &c. are excellent & often indispensable means of cure, they either exhaust so much of that, which is to become a part of the stamina of life, or so irritate to increased action & wear out, the already weakened powers of the alimentary canal,

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that a great Prostration of strength is the immediate consequence & a loss of constitutional vigour sensibly felt thro' life. By using our remedy, the wished for effect is produced tho' more slowly, & the powers of the constitution are rather improved, than injured: at any rate no loss is sustained except the retardation of growth for a few days, probably to be followed by a postponement of the hour of death for as many months.

In Chronic catarrh - where the stomach has become inflamed, this sympathy with the original seat of the complaint our remedy promises to be of service. In favour of this suggestion I have the testimony of a gentleman of my acquaintance who had for some time been much oppressed by the cough & Phlegm incident to the complaint. At my recommendation

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he tried for a short time entire abstinence from which he experienced an immediate & very considerable relief.

According to the general rule, that the arterial & absorbent systems are in the inverse ratio of each other; our remedy is especially useful in promoting the action of the absorbent vessels. Hence in Dropsy &c. where it arises from weakness of these vessels, abstinence comes in as an auxiliary for effecting a cure. Dr. Rush in his Medical inquiries relates a case exactly in point. To satisfy myself (says he) that an increased discharge of water in a case (of which he had been reading) was produced by the fasting only, I recommended it soon after I read the account, to a gentlewoman, whom I was then attending in an ascites. I was delighted with the effects of it. Her urine which before

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had not exceeded a half a pint a day, amounted to two Quarts on the day she fasted. I repeated the same precaution once a week for several weeks, & each time was informed of an increase of urine, tho' it was considerably less in the last experiments than in the first. Two other cases are related by the Doctor to the same effect. But Dropsy is a disease so apt to proceed from some organic derangement - that our remedy here is too uncertain to be relied on; and productive of certain mischief if improperly employed. Be this as it may, I have had certain & repeated experience of its efficacy in very speedily removing little excrescences of the face & other parts of the body. On the same principle a generous diet is recommended to those in low & weak states - where sloughs are to be

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thrown off - lest the too rapid action of the absorbents should deprive the powers of life. Thus also in wounds, where union by the first intention is desired & the patient is any way plethoric, a low diet is one of the most important means of effecting the object.

In the cutaneous diseases, so great is the sympathy existing between the stomach & skin, that acrid humours in the former, created by intemperance, are thrown directly on the latter & vice versa. Hence where it is all-important to reduce the eruption speedily as in cases of confluent small-pox &c. no remedy will be more likely to succeed than an entire abstinence from nourishment.

In the Sensitive system, our remedy comes in for a large share of attention. The brain clogged & enfeebled by a Plethora

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of its bloodvessels is immediately relieved from a state bordering on Coma & entire stupidity by severe fasting; indeed nothing is more common than keanness & acuteness proverbially connected with hunger. Every student knows the effect produced on his memory & judgment by a hearty dinner: and every drunkard is a daily witness of the debilitating & stupefying effect of ^{the} daily & nightly intoxication. The nerves also encumbered by excess of fat & blood, are unable so perfectly to perform their functions; hence a want of sensibility, or a morbid irritability comes on, to remove which nothing can excel our remedy for certainty of success. In frequent experiments which I have made on this subject - I have always found the powers of the mind invigorated - nervous irritability removed,

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and tone & energy restored to the whole system by an occasional entire abstinence. Dr. Rush in recommending abstinence as a proper caution during the time of the Yellow fever of 1793, remarks that thro' long fasting, the nerves of his fingers had acquired so acute sensibility, that he was enabled to distinguish with double facility the pulse of his patients. Dr. Trotter in his excellent work on the nervous temperament, has adduced many instances of his successful treatment of Nervous diseases on this principle; & he doubts not that most if not all the diseases of this class arise from excessive stimulus; and hence are to be treated by Abstinence.

Among the disorders of the muscular system, Gout most undoubtedly demands the prompt & long continued application

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of our remedy. Brought on generally by luxurious living, it is attended with all those symptoms of a deranged state of the stomach & bowels which so clearly indicate & require a change of living. Where patients can be brought to submit to the routine of exercise & low diet for the remainder of life; a perfect cure is generally produced. To hasten & confirm this desirable object - a frequent repetition of our remedy promises to be of a most salutary tendency.

A few remarks on its application to diseases of the generative system - shall close the present head. It is a fact well known that in Asia, where one man cohabits with many wives, they are accustomed to administer to him, the most acrid & stimulating articles of

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diet, to produce a more frequent re-
turn of their enjoyment & it is said,
with success. Hence in those dreadfully
disturbing diseases, Satyriasis & Nympho-
mania, I should conjecture, that a long
& severe fast in conjunction with other
remedies would most likely seldom
fail of success. Abstinence would not
only tend to lessen the secretion of the
immediately irritating cause of the dis-
eases but it would also have the effect
of giving tone to the system & consequent-
ly of counteracting that extreme irritabil-
ity on which the diseases depend.

Experiment.

It remains for me now to state the
immediate effect of the Remedy proposed
on the pulse & system generally. My last
experiment has produced the following
result. viz. Thursday Oct. 28. - At a hearty

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dinner & felt about as well as usual at 5 o'clock P.M. pulse 96 weak & small in vol. - ate $\frac{1}{4}$ of usual supper & walked 2 or 3 miles at 10 pulse 75 of natural strength & volume. Slept as usual. Friday - half past 7 drank a cup of warm sweetened water - at half past 9 pulse 67 at 11 - 54 at 1 - 75 at 3 - 74 $\frac{1}{2}$ at 5 - 74 at 6 drank as in the morning - at half past 10 pulse ⁶⁰ very weak & fluttering - head free from pain or dulness - but a sensation of stretching something, extended thro' my head & towards the stomach - which towards evening felt somewhat uneasy. In the afternoon & evening of Friday & morning of Saturday - there was a constant flow of saliva. My strength was much exhausted - tho' I took no exercise - & my sleep much disturbed: dreamed as usual of eating very heartily. Break-fast on Saturday immediately restored my strength & spirits.

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A few words on the efficacy of our Remedy as a Prophylactic, & I have done.

The necessarily simple diet of the Antediluvian Patriarchs, has been assigned as one reason out of many for the extraordinary age to which they lived. The Ancient Jews surely would not so often have practiced it as a religious rite, & the Christians so generally have followed their example - Had not something salutary been originally intended in its observance. Instances, of modern date, which none pretend to dispute, are recorded where absteritious diet has snatched the greatest debauchees from the very jaws of death - & prolonged their lives to an extreme old age. Flowers also it is said, can travel much better, without eating, immediately before setting out.

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My first Preceptor Dr. S. Tucker of Burlington (now a resident of this city) was in the habitual practice of abstaining from food, to prevent an expected attack of sickness; a practice which Dr. Rush used to recommend & to follow himself: & from whom he doubted not that many years were added to his life.

From the various considerations now detailed, I conclude that a weekly or monthly repetition of the practice just alluded to, would enable us as it were to keep within soundings, as to the healthy state of our stomach, & would lay the foundation for that tone of nerve & solidity of muscular fibre, which would enable us with the blessing of Heaven, effectually to keep off the attacks of disease, & qualify us to perform aright our various duties in life.